



Peter Bourjos' commute to camp easy, journey to White Sox roster spot harder

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The early-morning dash to White Sox camp in Glendale across the north rim of the Phoenix area via Loop 101 will be the easiest journey of Peter Bourjos' 31st year this season.

Rising at dawn to kiss toddler son Max and infant daughter Charley good-bye in their Scottsdale home won't be stressful, compared to schlepping the kids and wife Ashley cross-country to Florida, as he has done the past three spring trainings.

The longest journey of them all will be to an assured spot on the Sox roster for the fleet veteran outfielder. With Chicago roots, Bourjos – once a talked-about prospect with the pre-Mike Trout Angels – figures he's got a better shot with the Sox. The rebuilding Sox, poised to shed more veteran talent in exchange for youth, still need some experience to glue together the incoming kids.

Better yet, the Sox don't have an established center fielder, do not possess a locked-in leadoff man and can always use more speed. A good spring training means a revival of Bourjos' career that went off-track in Anaheim as Trout established himself as a real-life "Natural."

Officially, Bourjos has a minor-league invitation to spring training. Unofficially, the Sox will look at him closely to be no worse than a No. 4 outfielder, and maybe a starter.

Up to a dozen teams, including the Cubs, inquired about Bourjos' services. None offered an assured big-league deal. The Cubs looked at him for Triple-A depth at Iowa. But he knows he'd be way down and out on the world champions' depth chart, given Jon Jay and Albert Almora, Jr. are first in line for center, with Jason Heyward always able to swing over from right, and MVP Kris Bryant able to play the position in a pinch.



Peter Bourjos' early career with the Angels included sensational plays such as this home-run robbing leap in Anaheim.

“Not that the Sox are thin out there, but there’s not as much of a logjam as there is with the Cubs,” Bourjos said in between workouts the other day.

“Spring training is at home. On paper, the Sox are a great fit. They’re kind of rebuilding, but they still have a lot of talented players. I’d be able to help out the younger guys. It’s all on playing well in spring.”

Bourjos really meant proving he can hit again. He had a good offensive streak in the middle of the season as a sometimes-regular Phillies right fielder. Defensively, he can motor and climb a wall almost as well as Trout in pursuit of a potential homer.

“Peter was a guy we targeted early in the off-season and we’re excited to bring him into the organization,” said Sox assistant GM Jeremy Haber. “His speed and defensive ability in center field remain his strongest skills and allow him to impact the game in many ways. This spring, he will have the opportunity to compete for a roster spot and playing time in the outfield.”

Avoiding stereotype as backup

Like a left-handed hitter perceived as weak against southpaw pitchers, or a southpaw pitcher seemingly good against only lefty swingers, Bourjos has to avoid the stereotypes that get hung on big leaguers. In his case, he’s slotted in as a fourth or fifth outfielder.

“That’s hard to shake,” he said. “You definitely have to play regularly to hit. Not too many guys can be a bench bat.”

All he wants is to recapture some of the momentum of his 2011 season with the Angels. As the Angels’ center fielder, he led the American League in triples with 11, while batting .271 with 12 homers and 22 steals.

“Pete is one of those individuals you just wish the absolute best for,” said Tim Mead, the veteran vice president of communications of the Angels, who has seen them all pass through Anaheim over more than three decades. “He is a tireless worker with a tremendous passion for the game. He makes both any team and any clubhouse better. In a relatively short period of time with the Angels, Pete was responsible for a defensive highlight reel. He’s fun to watch and is a difference maker with the glove.”

Then Trout emerged with a bang in 2012, pushing Bourjos out of center. He could not go to right with Torii Hunter encamped. Left field belonged to the gilded Vernon Wells. At 25, he became an outfield backup.

After the 2013 season, Bourjos was traded with Randal Grichuk to the Cardinals for David Freese. He gained back some playing time, but his bat deflated. The Phillies then picked him up on waivers after the 2015 season.

Bourjos blames no one but himself for decreased playing time and numbers.

“I never really looked at it as bad luck,” he said. “Instead, you look in the mirror and look at your own performance. If I would have gone out and played well, I wouldn’t have struggled (for playing time).”



Peter Bourjos played mostly right field last season with the Phillies.

Father Chris Bourjos raised a second-generation big leaguer well. His son already has enjoyed a longer playing career than the old man. Chris Bourjos played all of 13 games as an outfielder with the Giants in 1980.

That Carter administration wrapup year represented a reunion that dated back to Mayfair (now Truman) City College for Bourjos and pitcher Alan Hargesheimer, who made his own big-league debut in San Francisco in '80. Bourjos and "Hargo" were teammates on the 1974-75 Mayfair Falcons, which generated some of the first published stories for a future Chicago Baseball Museum historian and author.

Bourjos, a Gordon Tech alum and Northwest Sider, and Hargesheimer, a Senn alum, North Sider and briefly a Cub in 1983, continued crossing paths in upcoming decades as scouts. Bourjos worked for the Blue Jays, Brewers, Orioles and Padres. Hargesheimer had a long run with the Tigers, followed by the Rockies and Padres.

Simple advice from Dad

Chris Bourjos did not steer his son one way or another when teams came calling recently. His main advice, in Peter's words: "Be yourself, be the same person and don't change. Be a good person."

The elder Bourjos was still based in Chicago when Peter was born March 31, 1987. He soon got sense, got out of the winters and re-located to the Phoenix area, where Peter grew up.

But plenty of family and friends are within easy commuting distance of Guaranteed Rate Field, a further motivation to Bourjos to hustle his way onto the Opening Day roster.

"I always love coming to Chicago," he said. "My wife's sister is in Milwaukee, so she can drive down to see us. It's great for the (Chicago-area) family.

"It always seemed like a pretty fair place to play, with a good hitting atmosphere."

Bourjos first hopes Glendale provides the hitting background to get him back to where he feels he belongs. If he succeeds, the Sox will have a big positive with a fine baseball pedigree in the middle of the field.



Chris Bourjos (left) was not only father of the groom at Peter's wedding, but also father of a second-generation big-league outfielder.